

# Paul Elmer More and the Redemption of History

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PAUL ELMER MORE is forgotten today. In spite of one or two recent studies,<sup>1</sup> one seldom sees a sentence or even a footnote devoted to this greatest of conservative and classical critics of the early twentieth century.

It would not matter very much to him. As T. S. Eliot said of him, here was "the concentrated mind seeking God . . . analyzing the disease and aberrations of humanity, but too intent ever to care to display mere intellectual brilliance, and too patient ever to feel any petty irritation and impatience with a mischievous and inattentive world."<sup>2</sup>

From the earliest essays in the eleven volumes of the *Shelburne Essays* to the last chapters of the *Greek Tradition*, More sought to establish those permanent principles upon which literature and civilization could rest.<sup>3</sup> As the years went by, More found his platonism being transformed into Christian faith; for him the ancient Hellenic experience was as much a *preparatio evangelica* as was the Hebraic.

Two themes dominate More's thought. One is *dualism*, the central conception from which all his thinking starts and the theme which controls all of his critical work, social philosophy, and historical writing. This dualism is candidly Platonic, in which the two polar elements of being are the *One* (felt in the personal sense of identity and continuity), and the *Many* (felt as a sense of multiplicity and discontinuity). The other controlling conception is that of *teleology*, the idea that the universe is based upon *purpose* and that there is an end, or "telos," toward which both nature and history tend. The second theme appears later in More's writings and grows in importance as his thought matures, although it has been implicit in his dualism all along. More reduces knowledge to "what we possess in the form of immediate affections."<sup>4</sup> The "affections" are of two kinds: (a) the "objective" sensations we have when looking at or touching an object, and (b) the "subjective" feelings, like pleasure, grief, love, or self-approval. Both kinds of knowing,

More holds, are irreducible. They are the ultimate data of experience beyond which knowledge cannot go. The ability to distinguish knowledge from thoughts about knowledge, or theory, is for More the mark of the finished mind, or as he would say, the complete sceptic.

Knowledge itself, however, is divisible into that of the affections themselves and the other, a scarcely distinguishable "check," or inhibition, which inserts itself between an affection and the impulsive response. This subtle concentration of the self, this "Inner Check," as More called it, lifts the self in the direction of "the one," while outside the self and now clearly distinguishable from it are the swarming impulses, the chaotic sensations on the periphery of consciousness, and the crowding confusion of the surrounding world—"the Many."<sup>6</sup>

The duality which More found in himself he found also in the universe. In the commingled flux and order of nature he saw the same two principles struggling with each other for the mastery: the superior centripetal power, holding both the stars and the atoms in their orbits, and by its regularity bearing witness to an overarching design in its activity; and the inferior centrifugal power, always pulling away from control toward the abyss—the force of negation, dark, formless, resistant to design, indefinable, "the disorder underlying all order."<sup>7</sup> In its largest sense, "the One" More associated with the Divine Being.

To that sludge which blocks or resists the will in the personal life More gave the Greek name, *rathymia*—slackness, inattention, and the willingness to drift aimlessly.

. . . The last discoverable source of evil in the soul [is] . . . that slackness which succumbs to the fatigue of holding fast to higher things and turns to the ease and comfort of change, the vanity that

flatters us into believing we have no other end than to be ourselves and to follow our inclinations. Slackness and vanity, these together are the dark remote origin of our guilt; they are the cause of our fall, and then of the misbehavior of the soul amid the trials which it has brought upon itself, whereby it is plunged ever deeper into the abyss of evil.<sup>8</sup>

Human history was just this agony to surmount the residual chaos of nature and bring the ideal down to earth and into life. The various codes of law, the sacred myths and customs, the universal longing for a golden age now passed away,<sup>9</sup> all bore testimony to the existence of an Upper World, a realm of transcendent ideals, as Plato expressed it, which holds us in its charge and after which we fashion our own imperfect models of personal and social order.<sup>10</sup> What is the theme of Sophocles's *Oedipus* but the stark moral responsibility of man and his inability to understand why he has it?

More summed up human experience in the sorrowful words he used repeatedly: "We are intellectually incompetent and morally responsible; that would appear to be the last lesson of life."<sup>11</sup>

## I

FOR MORE, history's Himalayan peaks were in the far past, the lofty central range of events occurring between 400 B.C. and A.D. 400. The revolution of thought that came with Socrates, always taken together with the towering expositions of that thought in Plato; the incarnation of the Word for those few years in Palestine; and the formulation of a creed expressive of the wisdom of the early Church fathers at Chalcedon: these were the Everests of history's great divide. Summits of magnificent height glow lower on the distant horizon—the ages of Homer, of Moses, and of Buddha—but they only lead to the higher

moments, they are not the consummative moments themselves.

Below these pinnacles of history More saw crowded foothills, sudden chasms, wandering valleys, and misty swamps. The upper light was clear enough in the landscape, but darkness obscured the better part of it, like a Doré landscape of the inferno. The undulating shadows had an explanation. Man, never content with the truths of his duality, always had to be thrashing out some "new" explanation for his suffering—for God, evil, accident, and the indifference of nature—another "final" answer which would put the cursed contradictions into a flawless, logical unity. In order to fashion this monism he had to omit or compromise one or the other of the two factors in the duality of existence; he would find, for example, by suppressing the reality of the empirical world, that the cosmos was a kind of glorified mathematics extrapolated out of an irresistible Absolute; or he would find by looking past the permanent attributes of the spiritual world that the universe was an improbably accident drifting aimlessly into a pointless future.

Looking back over history More saw several periods when man's rage either to over-rationalize on the one hand or to surrender to impulse on the other had formed spiritual swamps, from whence poisonous intellectual rivulets flowed to the perpetual pollution of the human spirit and civilization. One of these dank tarns was the ancient Alexandrian era (A.D. 50-400).

After Plato, Greek philosophy slipped back with astonishing speed into one or another kind of rationalistic monism. Explanations which profess to unify the material and the spiritual into one grand system of thought have always appealed to human beings. Spice such metaphysics with mystery and superstition, and one has a formula for instant and widespread popular acceptance. Such was the appeal of Neo-platonism and

Gnosticism.<sup>12</sup> With Plotinus the First Cause ceased to be the Father of creation, as had been true with Plato, and became "a naked nucleus of mechanical necessity" without heart, will, or sight, and out of which the cosmos drops down, sphere by sphere, into the bosom of Vacuity.<sup>13</sup> Here in Plotinian absolutism, asserts More, is the seed bed of every variety of Western mysticism, from Augustine to J. A. Symonds.<sup>14</sup> Classical civilization was crumbling, and Plotinus offered a way of escape for the troubled minds of his time.<sup>15</sup> He promised that through an intellectual ascent the soul could pass from this world of disordered passions up through the planes of discursive (and dismaying) reasoning and out of its own activity into the Final Vision of the Absolute, where all was peace.<sup>16</sup> Philo Judaeus was equally implicated in the transformation of Platonism into mysticism, and most of the philosophical Fathers of the Church were influenced by him, especially Origen and Clement of Alexandria.<sup>17</sup> The sink of ancient spirituality was Gnosticism, that deathbed whereon all the myths of oriental and occidental antiquity crowded together for a last convulsion.<sup>18</sup> Portentous for modern history, however, and the worst of the persisting delusions to emerge from this era, was romanticism, that thing wrought of Greek egoism and the Oriental idea of infinity as an "escape" from dependence upon the finite. Here was the origin of the "insatiable personality" with its extravagant passions, its craving for whatever is unlimited, its self-torment and "confusion of the sensuous and the spiritual," illustrated in the heresy of Valentinus, the tales of idealized love, and the romantic epic going back as far as Apollonius of Rhodes, one of the masters of the library at Alexandria.<sup>19</sup> Entering into the bloodstream of Christianity, the romantic malady came to the surface first in the medieval idea of the infinite, especially in the monkish mysti-

cism of Pseudo-Dionysius and St. John of the Cross; from thence the infection broke out in the rationalizations of the Scholastics, especially those of Duns Scotus and Occam.<sup>20</sup> Kept in check by orthodoxy and the occasional revivals of classical standards, romanticism was at times almost lost from view; only with the triumph of naturalism in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries did it re-assert its ancient hold over the imagination of man.

In the seventeenth century, especially in England, the imagination and the practical sense were divided into hostile camps.<sup>21</sup> Rationalistic science, begun by Bacon and Descartes and perfected by Aldravandus of Padua, Newton, and Locke, broke the hold of the supernatural, preparing the way for Hume in the eighteenth century to find morality entirely within nature.<sup>22</sup> The Puritans, surrendering imagination in religion for a hard, rationalistic piety, broke the hold of Christian sacramentalism and so paved the way for deism, atheism, and the watertight materialistic determinism which later arose in the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Reason, no longer associable with any supernatural realm, began to be viewed only as another aspect of nature.<sup>24</sup> It was only to be expected that in the eighteenth century, nature should become an intricately balanced machine, set in motion by a benevolent Deity, and left in its perfection to run by rational principles immanent in its structure. Whatever was left of the religious enthusiasm of the seventeenth century soon evaporated into the dry rationalism and pseudo-classicism of the age of Anne.<sup>25</sup>

There were two brave spirits of the seventeenth century who held a special place in More's affection because of their resistance to the science and naturalism of that age. The lesser of the two was Sir Thomas Browne, who wanted above all to reconcile the new science with the old religion and whose writings were for More an enchant-

ing illustration of the triumph of the religious imagination over the tyranny of the senses and reason;<sup>26</sup> the greater of the two was Blaise Pascal, whose *Pensées* were in More's thought the purest expression of reasoned faith from that day to this.<sup>27</sup> Pascal had the power to make ideas living things, especially the idea of eternity, which, once man has caught a glimpse of it, he is "no longer content in the diversions of this life" and spends the remainder of his days yearning for the sight of God and immortality.<sup>28</sup> In a day of rampaging rationalism, Pascal and Browne secured the *heart*, meaning not the emotions alone, but the combination of reason and feeling in "the spirit of intention which is faith."<sup>29</sup>

Unfortunately for most men of the time, reason and feeling did not combine into an "*O Alitudo*" of religious certainty. The imagination, severed from tradition by science and sectarianism, was left the prey of that side of human nature neglected by both Puritan and Deist; the emotions. The human sense of the deep cleft within had been denied; now it was to be sublimated and falsified as a conflict between the reason and the emotions and eventually externalized as a conflict between the individual and society. The romantic spirit, so long suppressed, now asserted itself again with a vengeance. The all-sufficient human ego, set free from the restraints of religion and encouraged in a militant expansiveness by the proud conquest of nature, soon saw itself as wholly a part of nature, unfolding with the growing universe into ever newer assertions of its unlimited powers. Once again the insatiable yearnings of ancient Alexandria were loosed upon the world, but now they were combined with a devotion to nature which could only end in abasement before the instincts. Philo and Plotinus had lost themselves in the One; the men of modern times were losing themselves in the Many.<sup>30</sup>

The steps downward should be taken in order. First came the liberation of the "feelings." The rationalistic revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had equalized the positions of reason and emotion in man by making them both "natural." Superficially, reason appeared to be supreme; in fact, it was held to be a totally "natural" faculty, a product of nature and wholly within nature. Therefore, by an unexpected transposition, the "natural" feelings and instincts were put on an equal footing with the rational faculty and had only to assert their right to be attended to if they wanted to be heard, with the result that the door was left open for poets like Blake and rebels like Rousseau to raise the insubordination of impulse and unrestrained private feeling.<sup>31</sup> Blake lifted the revolt against the pseudo-classicism of the day in the name of a new spirituality, which was mistaken by many for a return to spiritual insight but in fact was only a capitulation to sub-rational impulses and wandering visions. The liberty of the enlightenment passed quickly into the libertinism of the Romantic Movement, properly so called, which regarded human life as primarily an opportunity for the limitless expansion of the emotions.<sup>32</sup>

It was Rousseau, however, summing up in himself all of the elements opposing what was classical and humanistic and submitting them to the world as if entirely new, who sealed the fate of succeeding centuries. In *Emile*, Rousseau makes the aim of education the freeing of a child's instincts from the perverting control of schoolmaster and society and allowing them to develop "naturally." Starting with the assumption of the innate goodness of the natural man, Rousseau was forced to find man's corruption outside of himself; banishing the true dualism of the human spirit, he had to erect a false dualism between nature and civilization, between man and the state. Evil with

Rousseau became a social phenomenon, a conspiracy of property and law against the freedom of the individual. In this view anyone who would escape the corruptions of the world would have to return to nature; only there could he find the sympathy denied him in society; there alone could he recover the peace and innocence missing among men and commune with the benign voices of field and brook. Reason had no share in this religion, except that of certifying the conviction that God was somehow in nature, united with her by a sympathy corresponding to that which human beings felt in her presence.

Hume transformed the world into a flux;<sup>33</sup> Berkeley identified world and idea, thus preparing the way for the romantic notion of the unlimited, fluctuating ego;<sup>34</sup> Adam Smith located the origin of virtue in sympathy;<sup>35</sup> and Rousseau said that the force of sympathy innate in mankind had to be called into action as the *volonté générale*, the embracing of the "desires of individuals into one harmonious purpose."<sup>36</sup>

The Romantic liberation of the feelings becomes for Rousseau the basis of a new social purpose, the feelings being harnessed to the *general will* for the good of all. The religion of nature, based on the subjective, by being changed into something "objective," becomes the religion of the state.<sup>37</sup> After Rousseau, when Romanticism passes from France into Germany, the doctrine of social sympathy becomes a chief doctrine of Romantic sentimentality and the basis of our modern ethics of humanitarianism.<sup>38</sup>

The arrival of humanitarianism, the doctrinaire organization of eighteenth-century sentimentalism, More saw as the second fateful step taken in the West toward our own times. Rousseau's double ethic of self-love and sympathy was eventually to culminate in the various forms of individualism and socialism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; both tendencies

strangely cooperative despite their mutual repugnance. The extreme individualism practiced by the post-Romantics of Edwardian England, the French decadents, and the American realists combined easily with the socialism of the Marxists, the Fabians, and the Progressives on a platform of rebellion, which would result in our time as personal disorder, *ennui*, surrender to instinct, then to impulse, and finally to tyranny.

The rebels justified their principles on humanitarian grounds, and it is still humanitarianism which holds these disciples of egotism and brotherhood together.

Humanitarianism might not have been enough to keep the egotistical and collectivist tendencies from flying apart had not science come to her assistance. Essentially, humanitarianism was romantic self-pity translated into pity for all mankind, indeed for the whole of suffering nature. No longer directed from above by supernatural laws, men were to join each other in a spirit of fraternal love for bringing justice, peace, and plenty to the earth. Dominated by humanitarianism, men now looked to their feelings and impulses when they wished to make judgments, write poetry, or plan cities.<sup>39</sup> The result was moral and esthetic impressionism, surrender on a grand scale to the flux.<sup>40</sup> Rationalistic science, however it had appeared since Bacon's day to be preoccupied with empirical fact, and so excluding sentiment from the serious business of life, was nevertheless as much subservient to the law of change as were art and public sentiment. Forever experimenting, the scientist was always discovering new facts or new methods of organizing the facts; his "openness" to phenomenal change was a part of his approach to life. It was to be expected, therefore, when he turned to the humanities, that he would be the impressionist *par excellence*: "he simply carries into art the law of change with

which he has dealt in his proper sphere, and acknowledges no principle of taste superior to the shifting pleasure of the individual."<sup>41</sup> Practical philosophy, which is in part the effort of reason to come to grips with the dominating spirit of an age in terms that the age can understand, followed science in finding only "an indefinite congeries of changes" (Dewey, Bergson, Whitehead) at the heart of the universe.<sup>41</sup> Personal whim and fellow-feeling now were sanctified by scientific "law" and the philosophical jargon of Pragmatism. Change was lord; the self was all-sufficient in things spiritual; sympathy and social experiment were the goals of society. The dogma of evolution had shown that the world had by its own innate powers developed man from a germ; why could it not be expected that man and his society would not also "progress" by unlimited experiment to an immeasurably beautiful future? And so humanitarianism, buttressed by science, was linked to a new doctrine of progress and sanctified by grandiose hopes. This was the third step leading to the immediate present.

We are commonly told, said More, that the distractions from which the men of the modern world suffer are the result of conflicting philosophies of life; but the case is otherwise. What we really see are the self-contradictions within a single philosophy which as certainly dominates the thought of men today as the Church did in the thirteenth century. Our innumerable isms all go back to the ism of Change because we have turned our minds to *things* and insisted "upon mastering nature by regarding ourselves as a part of nature." The result is that modern man has become a slave of the Absolute once again, this time absolute naturalism. Two philosophical currents flow from this overriding naturalism, seemingly contradictory, yet equally logical from the premises. The one stresses that the universe

runs by an intricate system of self-perpetuating laws, all causally related and ostensibly decipherable were it not for man's limitations of life and energy. Contemporary socio-political philosophers call this view behaviorism, so far as it concerns man.<sup>43</sup> The other current of thought stresses the infinite accidentalness of nature and says that the universe is an incalculable flux of contingences without plan or meaning. In this view man is merely a "passive channel for an ever-flowing stream of sensations."<sup>44</sup> In literature the first current gives us sentimental realism and the view of man as a helpless victim of overpowering hostile circumstances; it spawns social and political programs aimed at transforming man's environment instead of man himself; it nourishes hatred of the past and an unlimited number of adjustments to the present on the basis of what is momentarily most pleasant (or least painful); and it encourages an escape into the future as a relief from its own snares. The second current abandons man almost completely in order to focus attention on the units of impulse, instinct, and emotion which go to make up the man; man under this second view is not so much a victim, as nothing at all; socially and esthetically, the viewpoint encourages abandonment to every passing impulse, escape from standards, expressionism, eccentricity for its own sake, dadism, the glorification of drift—the hippie movement.<sup>45</sup> The first current tends to be epicurean and pessimistic; the second, hedonistic and nihilistic.<sup>46</sup> Both spring from monistic naturalism.

Of one thing More was sure: modern civilization would not survive an unbridled lust for change. At the present rate of their surrender to impulse, literature and art would simply cease to be. Thereafter social and economic order would disappear. Humanitarian socialism, far from being a bulwark against the war of all against all,

would at least turn inward upon itself:

In a world made up of passions and desires alone, the attempt to enter into the personal emotions of others will react in an intensifying of our own emotions, and the effort to lose one's self in mankind will be balanced by a morbid craving for the absorption of mankind in one's self. . . .<sup>47</sup>

Having tracked western thought from Bacon through Rousseau and Darwin up to Dewey and Whitehead, More concludes:

I should assert that our vacillating half-heartedness is the inevitable outcome of the endeavour, persistent since the naturalistic invasion of the Renaissance, to flee from the paradox of life to some philosophy of life which will merge, no matter how, the mechanical and the human together.<sup>48</sup>

## II

FOR MORE, the chief failing of human thought throughout history was its habitual tendency to find "perfect" explanations for all of man's persistent problems. Using reason as an all-sufficient guide, men would construct first one philosophical system and then another in terms of either one or the other of the two modes of being, the One or the Many, in order to explain reality. Some systems based everything on motion, others were all for seeing reality as matter, still others held out for spirit, or energy, or Mind, and what not. The evil was not in using the reason to make investigations; rather, it was the tendency to absolutize or even divinize the explanation of the reason. It was one of the weaknesses of reason, said More, that it could not be content with approximate explanations of reality. In this respect the self-assertion of the reason was only another aspect of man's self-destructive pride. What was needed was the leavening influence at all times of humility

and commonsense, or "the Humility of Commonsense," as he titled one of his essays.<sup>49</sup>

The rationalism I denounce has no affinity to the reasonableness of commonsense; it is rather just that defalcation of the reason to its own unreal abstractions which, obscuring the true function of the master faculty of our composite being, reduces the soul of man to a nonentity controlled by fatalistic law or to a puppet tossed in the winds of irresponsibility.<sup>50</sup>

"The Demon of the Absolute," More called this disturber of man's spirit: "reason run amuck."<sup>51</sup> So long as it accepted the actual data of experience, reason was a guide and friend; but when it acted in disregard of factual matter and set up its own absolutes as truth it became delusory. The usurpations of reason constituted in More's mind the better part of the story of philosophy since the days of Heraclitus and Parmenides, who had set the wrangle going over whether ultimate reality were all unity and rest or all flux and multiplicity; it had been also the story in political history, he said, whenever men had attempted to set up the unchecked authority of the State, whether it be the tyrant or the people; it had been the case in religion when men were asked to choose between an Absolute Being who was casually connected to everything that had happened, good or evil, and no God at all; or when they were forced to choose between an infallible Church and unchecked religious individualism.<sup>52</sup> In the days of Valentinus and Philo, religion was dressed in the mystical robes of idealized intellectual abstractions, and God was simply the highest, most unlimited abstraction of all; in the thirteenth century, the Church usurped infallible Papal authority to itself; in the seventeenth century, the fallacy transformed itself into an infallible Bible; in the eighteenth came

the infallible reason; in the nineteenth, infallible feeling, infallible nature, infallible science, infallible progress; and in the twentieth, infallible democracy and infallible change. There was always some system of rationalistic abstractions to seduce the pride of man and fix him in a new monism.

The paradox of the twentieth century was that the monism dominating the age was based on pluralism and relativism. The existentialism, pragmatism, and process philosophy of the age were only manifestations of the same old naturalism which had dominated men's minds since the seventeenth century. The spate of "liberated" moralists, "frank" fictionalists, "process" theologians, "progressive" educationalists, and ordinary people "doing what comes naturally"—what were they but instruments of the philosophy of change? And it was this divinization of change, this apotheosis of "the newest," this glorification of the flux, this deification of the teachers of relative values which constituted the new absolutism.<sup>53</sup>

This was dangerous enough, but added to the new absolutism was a phenomenon unique in human culture, making the modern situation perilous almost beyond remedy—the *enfeeblement of the imagination*.<sup>54</sup> Other cultures had been dominated by one absolute or another, but always there had been a respect for the past, some carry-over of wisdom from previous ages which had eventually helped to correct the life and thought of the time. For what was imagination in the high historical sense but "the indwelling of the past in the present?"<sup>55</sup> But the twentieth century seemed committed to the abandonment of its cultural heritage and the repudiation of everything but what concerned the immediate present or future.

More's doctrine of imagination is one of the most important categories of his

thought and deserves brief attention in passing, particularly as it relates to his assessment of the twentieth century. He held that the American domination of modern culture was portentous, since as early as Franklin (who, he said, was the real father of the country), it was apparent that the American genius would be supereminently "practical," absorbed in problems of the present and the immediate future, and driven by a kind of unresting energy to tinker with the mechanico-empirical environment.<sup>56</sup> Morse, Edison, Ford, and Firestone were as much representative of the American imagination at one level as Dewey, Woodrow Wilson, and James Branch Cabell were at another. None of them had an ear for those remote voices murmuring the symbolic meaning of the puppet-actions of this world; none had any feeling for that obscuring shadow which hovers over the present out of the past and smiles ironically at the repetitious "originality" of men who have simply forgotten the lessons of history; not one had the power of visualizing the incorporeal and the eternal.<sup>57</sup>

The saddest feature of the American consciousness of the twentieth century was the absence of the religious side of this historical imagination: that power of seeing the dispersed fragments of reality under a unifying symbol of Divine guidance. Men, more than ever before, seemed incapable of recognizing that the solid-seeming phenomena of nature and empirical science "are but the shadow, too often distorted and misleading, of the greater reality which resides within the observer himself." In their haste they had lost the power of subjecting the lesser to the greater and "of finding through the many that return to the one, which was the *esemplastic* function of the imagination."<sup>58</sup> Men must have that "sense of something other and different lurking beneath natural law" if their ra-

tionality is not to lead them into the quicksand. It was this inability, in Sir Thomas Browne's words, to teach "haggard and unreclaimed reason to stoop unto the lure of faith" which was dooming the modern world.

World War I had been made possible, More argued, by liberals like Lord Morley, who had sanctioned the very forces which were destroying the traditions and values they claimed to be defending.<sup>60</sup> There was a new enslavement to the sub-human, all too evident in both the mechanized butchery of the war and the cynical emancipation of limitless animality in the years following it.<sup>61</sup> "The strange, unwilling brotherhood" of anarchic individualism and humanitarian collectivism, gotten up by Protestant socialists and Europe's proletarian intellectuals,<sup>62</sup> had been formed on the two principles most at work in society since the time of Rousseau, the *lust for power* and the *lust of irresponsibility*.<sup>63</sup> Even the modern university had sold out to the doctrines of power and human service.<sup>64</sup> The fear of God was now replaced with a debased fear, the fear of emptiness, of purposeless, illustrated so vividly in the art of Proust,<sup>65</sup> Baudelaire,<sup>66</sup> and Joyce.<sup>67</sup> Modern men were educated in no exercise save that of thinking about themselves, "and in *le néant* beyond the phantasmagoria of unsatisfied and forever insatiable desires the only reality for them [was] the grinning figure of Fear."<sup>68</sup> Existentialism, as a popular term, had not come on the scene in More's day, but when More spoke of "the void, the nothingness" as being the prime immediate of contemporary metaphysics he had his finger on what was already there and soon to sprout a name.<sup>69</sup> In contemporary philosophy and art, More wrote in a moment of passionate visualization, "we appear to be adrift on a waste expanse of racing shadows" and the events through which we pass

rise out of the storm "like isolated rocks" only to "melt into fluctuant forms like the waves that toss about them."<sup>70</sup>

Was there hope? If there was, it was only in the restoration of the religious imagination. While More at times permitted himself to dream about possible programs of action, he knew that civilization could not be saved or renewed without the restoration of a fundamental religiousness. God could not be driven from His universe, but men seemed bent on trying to forget Him. Never had pride exalted itself so stridently against the holy; never had the permanent things been so blasphemed. The collectivist principle, whose power lay in the universal sentimentality of the populace, was now dominant on so vast a scale, because of technical skills, as to constitute an entirely new kind of satanism on earth.

### III

IN HIS EARLIER years More had been content to propound a return to dualism as the answer to modern degeneracy;<sup>71</sup> ultimately he came to identify the "something permanent" with the Logos of the New Testament:

To believe seriously in the otherworld of God and ideas, to lift the mind habitually to the contemplation of supernatural realities until it learns of a certainty that its home is there, to live in that realm wholeheartedly, yet without shrinking or denying the claims of nature, to centre the distracted will upon God as the King of righteousness, to see in this maze of gliding phenomena, or to know without seeing, the obscured presence of veritable justice and beauty, to retain faith in a divine purpose at work within the world despite all the persuasions of infinite illusion, to take one's part valiantly in the eternal conflict of truth—that is not a light choice or a feeble task.<sup>72</sup>

More refused baptism and never took the communion in spite of his heavy emphasis on the Eucharist. He was content to rest, he said, in its potency over his imagination.<sup>73</sup>

For if creation is a slow and painful redemption of the world of matter for spiritual ends, and if the Incarnation may be regarded as a summary act condensing in one tense moment the will and benevolence of the Creator, with all they cost, and by its appealing force bringing man back to a consciousness of his share in the glorious task; then the Eucharist may be taken as man's response to the appeal and as an enactment in human hands complementary to the divine drama that had its close on Calvary. We are here, already incarnate, soul and body, Word and flesh; it is for us, imitating our great exemplar, so to live in purity and holiness, in faith and charity, that the full man shall be made ready for enjoyment of the Ideal world. And in the invocation of the Holy Ghost upon the elements I see, as it were, an epitome of the religious life, a presentation in foreshortened form of the slow spiritualization of the flesh.<sup>74</sup>

*"The slow spiritualization of the flesh."*  
This is More's best summary of his own view of history. The Word had become flesh so that flesh could become Word. That "one intense moment" at the summit of human experience, when the will of the Creator was concentrated in the death and resurrection of the Nazarene, was the pledge of God's continued interaction with the upward longings of men and a promise of their own eventual redemption. Men are called to share in the glorious task of ransoming nature for spiritual ends.<sup>75</sup> This is their true purpose. Civilization is nothing, if it is not proof of this; culture in the true sense has no meaning if it does not mean

this; art, literature, and philosophy express this, or they express nothing to the point; and history is a nightmare, hope a bubble, if men are not gods in the making

and if it is not their duty here below to trace the operations of the *Logos* in all of their duties and joys and to hold such truth "in fee for the generations to come."<sup>76</sup>

<sup>7</sup>The latest and best is Francis X. Duggan's "Paul Elmer More," in *Twayne's United States Authors Series*, #106 (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1966).

<sup>8</sup>T. S. Eliot, "Paul Elmer More," *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, February 5, 1937.

<sup>9</sup>There are eleven volumes in the first series of *The Shelburne Essays* (1905-1921); three in the second series, called *New Shelburne Essays* (1928-1936); four volumes in *The Greek Tradition: The Religion of Plato* (1921), *Hellenistic Philosophies* (1923), *The Christ of the New Testament* (1924), and *Christ the Word* (1927). *Platonism* (1917: rev. 1926) and *The Catholic Faith* (1931) are complementary works to *The Greek Tradition*. More was first literary editor and then editor of the *Nation* from 1906 to 1914, and wrote a critical column for the *Independent*, the *New York Evening Post*, and a score of periodicals. His many other writings include two volumes of poetry, an epistolary novel, an edition of Byron's works, a biography of Franklin, and the beautiful *Pages from an Oxford Diary*, published after his death in 1937.

<sup>10</sup>Paul Elmer More, *The Sceptical Approach to Religion. New Shelburne Essays, Volume II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1934), 2. Hereafter *SAR*.

<sup>11</sup>"Knowledge is limited to what we have, not by inference from something else, but directly and without the intervention of inferential reason." *Ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>12</sup>For a full discussion of More's dualism, see "Definitions of Dualism," in his *The Drift of Romanticism. Shelburne Essays: Eighth Series* (New York: Phaeton Press, 1967), pp. 245ff. The volumes in the *Shelburne Essays* will be referred to hereafter as *SE I*, *SE II*, etc.

<sup>13</sup>Paul Elmer More, *The Religion of Plato. The Greek Tradition, Volume I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921), p. 215. See also p. 205. Hereafter *RP*.

<sup>14</sup>Paul Elmer More, *Hellenistic Philosophies. The Greek Tradition, Volume II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1923), p. 201. Hereafter *HP*.

<sup>15</sup>See More's "The Theme of 'Paradise Lost,'" *SE, IV*, pp. 239-53. Also More's *The Christ of the New Testament. The Greek Tradition, Volume III* (Princeton University Press, 1924), p. 78.

<sup>16</sup>*RP*, p. 309ff.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 78; *SAR*, p. 191.

<sup>18</sup>*SAR*, p. 57.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 92-8.

<sup>20</sup>Paul Elmer More, *The Catholic Faith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1931), pp. 306-312. Hereafter *CF*. More traces Plotinus's Absolute to Aristotle (*RP*, pp. 313-18).

<sup>21</sup>*HP*, p. 194 and rest of chapter, "Plotinus."

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 189-92.

<sup>23</sup>*RP*, pp. 315-17.

<sup>24</sup>Paul Elmer More, *Christ the Word. The Greek Tradition, Volume IV* (Princeton: The Princeton University Press, 1927), p. 70. See also pp. 30-52. Hereafter *CW*.

<sup>25</sup>Valentinus (d. 160); Apollonius of Rhodes (B.C. 3rd Cent.).

<sup>26</sup>*CF*, p. 260ff.; *CW*, pp. 268-9; also p. vi.

<sup>27</sup>*SE*, X, pp. 134-5.

<sup>28</sup>*SE*, VI, p. 160; *SE*, VIII, pp. 158-9.

<sup>29</sup>*SE*, VI, pp. 189-193; *SE*, VIII, p. 217.

<sup>30</sup>*SE*, VIII, p. 229.

<sup>31</sup>*SE*, VII, pp. 11-13; *SE*, X, pp. 106-7; *SE*, III, pp. 46-48.

<sup>32</sup>*SE*, VI, pp. 154-86.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 101-2, 146, 152.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>36</sup>*SE*, III, p. 256ff.

<sup>37</sup>*SE*, VIII, p. 230.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>40</sup>*SE*, X, pp. 221-2.

<sup>41</sup>*SE*, VIII, p. 164.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>43</sup>*SE*, VI, p. 234.

<sup>44</sup>*SE*, VIII, p. 169.

<sup>45</sup>Paul Elmer More, *The Demon of the Absolute. New Shelburne Essays, Volume I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1928), p. 32ff. Hereafter *DA*.

<sup>46</sup>*SE*, VIII, pp. 161-9.

<sup>47</sup>*SE*, VII, p. 251.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 252-3.

<sup>49</sup>*DA*, pp. ix-x.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xi, 49.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 39-41; *SE*, VII, pp. 259-60.

<sup>52</sup>*SE*, VIII, p. 186ff.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>54</sup>*DA*, p. 51.

<sup>46</sup>See Norman Foerster, Ed., *Humanism and America. Essays on the Outlook of Modern Civilization* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1930), pp. 52-74. The essay in this work was taken from sections IV and V of the title essay in *DA*.

<sup>47</sup>*DA*, p. xii.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup>Paul Elmer More, *On Being Human. New Shelburne Essays, Volume III* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936), pp. 137-43. Hereafter *OB*. See also *SE*, VIII, pp. 208-10; *DA*, pp. 6-7; 39ff.

<sup>51</sup>*SE*, II, p. 189.

<sup>52</sup>*SE*, IV, p. 154.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 129-30, 152-3.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 130, 152, 154. For another definition of the religious imagination see *HP*, p. 239.

<sup>55</sup>*SE*, VI, pp. 167-8. More borrows "esemplastic" from Coleridge, whom he refers to in passing.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>57</sup>*SE*, XI, pp. 212-22.

<sup>58</sup>*SE*, VIII, p. 238; *DA*, p. 39ff, 69ff, 98, 118.

<sup>59</sup>*SE*, X, 297ff.

<sup>60</sup>*OB*, pp. 109-16.

<sup>61</sup>*SE*, XI, p. 244.

<sup>62</sup>*OB*, pp. 48-9.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 106-9, 113.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 79-89, 91-6.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 48-9.

<sup>68</sup>"... The only salvation is in the recognition of some superior guiding and dividing law of just rule and right subordination, in the perception, that is, of something permanent within the flux." *SE*, VII, p. 267.

<sup>69</sup>*CF*, p. 312.

<sup>70</sup>Paul Elmer More, *Pages from an Oxford Diary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1937), p. 74.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.* p. 73.

<sup>72</sup>*CW*, p. 328.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 301.